

Herbert Windsor Mumford, 1871–1938: A Brief Biography

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The life of Herbert Windsor Mumford exemplifies the advent and progression of the professional Animal Scientist in the Land-Grant Institutions of the country. His successive roles from student of Animal Husbandry through the highest administrative posts in agricultural education, experimentation and extension, and contributions to agricultural policy and programs on a national level established a chapter in agricultural annals.

Introductory

The setting was the midcontinent, where production and marketing met in the Stock Yards of Chicago, “butcher for the world.”

For Herbert Mumford the welfare of the rural farmer was as much his responsibility as the development of students, the University, or the livestock industry, and he was successful in contributing

significantly to all. He believed that “service to agriculture was service to humanity.”

Background

Typical of his professional peers, he spent his early years on a farm. Less typically, he maintained an active relationship to farming through practical farm ownership and management.

He was born in 1871, son of Elisha and Julia Camburn Mumford, in Moscow, MI, and gained his education in his home state. Following his introductory college years at Albion College, Albion, MI, he recognized his dominant agricultural interest and completed his degree at Michigan Agricultural College. Again his agricultural interest, coupled with his father’s death, prevailed and he returned to the home farm, “Brookwater,” for four years before accepting an appointment as instructor and assistant in the Experiment Station at his Alma Mater. He progressed quickly to Professor and “Animal Husbandry Investigator.”

In 1901 he began his long career at the University of Illinois, first as “Chief of Animal Husbandry.” In 1922 he was appointed Dean of the College of Agriculture and continued in that position until his death in 1938.

The Academician; The Practitioner

Mumford was simultaneously an academic stockman and a practicing stockman. With a farm background, farm experience, and farm ownership he, as was said repetitively, was “no synthetic farmer.” On his farms in Michigan (“Brookwater”) and Illinois, his personal interest and expertise was in purebred breeding stock, particularly Duroc hogs and Jersey cattle. He was a proponent of “line” breeding.

He was also a specialist in beef cattle. At the Illinois Station, Mumford inaugurated the “carload lot” technique in cattle feeding research. In 1905, he authored *Beef Production*; in 1907, *Principles of Livestock Breeding*; and in 1910, *Domesticated Animals and Plants*.

In recognition of his effectiveness as a livestock judge, he was named Chair of Cattle Jurors at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair.

He was once introduced, lightheartedly, as “the man who is known and loved by all the animals on the South Farm” (University of Illinois).

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Mumford's understanding of and admiration for Stockmen became evident throughout the livestock world with the publication (*Breeder's Gazette*, 1915) of a tribute he composed which was subsequently submitted to the *Gazette* by his Dean, Eugene Davenport, who was impressed and moved by the sentiment and effective expression.

A Tribute to the Stockman

Behold the Stockman! Artist and Artisan.

He may be polished, or a diamond in the rough—but always a gem.

Whose devotion to his animals is second only to his love of God and family.

Whose gripping affection is tempered only by his inborn sense of the true proportion of things.

Who cheerfully braves personal discomfort to make sure his live stock suffer not.

To him there is rhythm in the clatter of the horse's hoof, music in the bleating of the sheep and in the lowing of the herd.

His approaching footsteps call forth the affectionate whinny of recognition.

His calm, well-modulated voice inspires confidence and wins affection.

His coming is greeted with demonstrations of pleasure, and his going with evident disappointment.

Who sees something more in cows than the drudgery of milking, more in swine than the grunt and squeal, more in the horse than the patient servant, and more in sheep than the golden hoof.

Herdsmen, shepherd, groom—yes, and more. Broad-minded, big-hearted whole-souled; whose life and character linger long after the cordial greeting is stilled and the hearty handshake is but a memory; whose silent influence forever lives. May his kind multiply and replenish the earth.

Others, including family members, were also moved. Editor Samuel Guard considered it an appropriate "epitaph." [Personal note of author: It was my privilege to have on my office wall a framed copy of the "Tribute" presented to me by Professor Mary Mumford, then of the University of Kentucky. U.S.G.]

Recently (1993), just prior to this writing, a bronze casting of the "Tribute" was prominently placed in the Animal Sciences Building at the University of Illinois, accompanied by a brief biographical sketch of Herbert Windsor Mumford.

The Economist

Mumford's recognition of the need for integration of economic principles with all facets of agriculture influenced his thinking, research, and activities.

Early in his career, Mumford proposed a concept for a system of marketing based on a standardized classification of the product. The bulletin² was cited by the Federal Experiment Station Record as a first bulletin on marketing, and also the first to present such a concept. He furthered that concept as applied to other species and products in publications titled *Market Classes and Grades of Cattle; Swine; and Horses and Mules*³. These publications were considered classic and the principle has continued in use throughout the years.

Again, recognizing the relationship of economics to agriculture, education, and extension, he became the prime promoter at Illinois for the establishment of a Department of Agricultural Economics in the structure of the College.

Mumford's "economist" role continued throughout his career. In 1920 he was appointed Director of the newly established Department of Livestock Marketing of the Illinois Agricultural Association. Attention was directed to facilitating the buying and selling of livestock both within and between states. The marketing situation was studied at the Union Stock Yards; farmers' claims were considered and adjusted. Mumford was granted leave from the University for the duration of this assignment.

He served on the National Livestock Marketing "Committee of Fifteen" from which the Producer's Livestock Agency evolved, subsequently acclaimed as one of the most successful voluntary cooperative marketing systems in the country.

Harold Hannah⁴, who subsequently held positions as Professor of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Law and Associate Dean at the University of Illinois, was Assistant to Dean Mumford in 1937–38. Hannah observed, relative to that period, "It was not easy to be a Dean of Agriculture in the late 1920's and 1930's. Dean Mumford saw more clearly than most the problems that beset agriculture."

In 1928 Herbert Mumford organized and inaugurated a statewide Agricultural Adjustment Program for Illinois. He was aware that farmers were adversely affected by the "economic malaise" that would gradually sweep the country. "He saw clearly that the marketing of agricultural products would play as important a role in future years as methods of increasing production had played in the past..." (Moores).⁵ Adjustment conferences held in each

²*Production and Marketing of Wool*. Mich. Agric. Exp. Sta. Bull. 178, 1900.

³Ill. Agric. Exp. Sta. Bull. 78, 97, 122.

⁴Hannah, H. W., *Academic Interlude*, Published by the College of Agriculture, University of Illinois, 1989.

⁵Moores, R. G., *Fields of Rich Toil, The Development of the University of Illinois College of Agriculture*, Univ. of Ill. Press, 1970.

farming-type area of the state and continued annually gained commendation by Washington officials and provided a model for the National Agricultural Adjustment program instituted in 1933.

The Administrator

The role of Dean required leadership and administrative acuity in directing all major units within the Land Grant mission.

C. W. Warburton, Federal Director of Extension, observed, "In meetings of national groups such as the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, his [Mumford's] ability to present his views logically, concisely and yet tactfully always made a lasting impression. . . ."

A resolution of the University Senate, of which he was the senior active member lauded Dean Mumford: "His unique ability to evaluate qualities of others contributed to his administrative success in delegating responsibilities and creating an atmosphere which made it possible for others to work for and with him and to receive 'full credit for their work.'"

The last segment of that statement verifies Mumford's expressed philosophy. "There is no limit to the good a man can do if he doesn't care who gets the credit." Goals he set for all within his leadership were high: "Ideals should improve and grow the same as grasp of technical facts."

University President Willard said that Mumford "was a master administrator and an inspiring leader who, having made up his mind, reached his objectives with quiet determination tempered always with fairness and sound judgement."

The Faculty Senate of the College of Agriculture noted: "His interest in students of the College never lessened no matter how much his other responsibilities increased."

Dean Henry Rusk, successor to Dean Mumford at the University, presiding at the ceremonies naming the Administrative Building "Mumford Hall" summarized, "In all his institutional and public relations he constantly grew in vision and comprehension of the service which the University could and should render. . . and he never lacked for courage to act. . . ."

The respect with which Dean Mumford was regarded was evident in his participation in the national observance of the 75th anniversary of the Federal Land-Grant System. He was selected as

representative speaker and participant on a national broadcast featuring President Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace.

Hannah⁴ also recorded: "Through speeches and writing he reminded the agricultural community, not only in Illinois but also in other states, that there were bright spots in agriculture even during those bad times. He also stressed that, regardless of the current economy, it still paid to farm well. His thinking and exhortations were contained in two early circulars of the Agricultural Extension Service. One, published in 1931, was entitled *Some Evidence of Agricultural Progress*. The second, published in 1936, was entitled *It Still Pays to Farm Well*."

A news source printed, "The Dean in recent years has been amazingly prolific, his ideas and seasoned judgment being of high value to farmers, business men and others interested in agriculture and its new and serious problems."

His concern for conservation was repeatedly expressed. Of striking evidence was his publication in *Science*, in the month following his death: "A Half Century of Achievement by the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station."⁶

Mumford's service and responsibilities extended through numerous professional organizations, breed associations, scientific societies, honoraries and government boards. He served several offices in the American Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. Community affiliations included the University YMCA (Board of Directors), Methodist Church (class teacher), and Rotary.

The Internationalist

The interest and influence of Herbert Mumford extended beyond state and national boundaries. Early international visits (1897) were surveys of animal agriculture in Great Britain, France, Belgium, and Holland. In 1908 he investigated cattle raising in Argentina, which was potentially in conflict with U.S. interests, particularly disease problems. In 1928 he was a member of an invitational commission to study agricultural conditions in Germany. In 1930 he was requested by the Mexican Government to review agricultural education and farming.⁷

Herbert Mumford's international travel began in the final decade of the 19th Century. Now, in the final decade of the 20th Century (1995) "Great Grandfather Mumford" would surely have been pleased to know that the current young generation of his family is involved in international assignments and studies.

The Brothers

The name Mumford was well known in midwestern institutions and throughout the federal system. Herbert and his brother Frederick served simultaneously as Dean in Illinois and Missouri, respectively. They

⁶*Science* 87:2268, June 17, 1938, pp 539-542.

⁷Personal note of authors: We had the interesting experience in 1971, at the National Agricultural University of Mexico at Chapingo, to converse with the then-Vice President of the Institution who, as he told us, had been a student guide and interpreter for Dean Mumford at the time of Mumford's visit. The Vice President further commended Mumford's courtesy to Mexico and to him in his then-student status.

were honored jointly at their Alma Mater, Michigan State College, in 1927. Each received the honorary degree of Doctor of Agriculture.

The Man

Beyond the outward description of "a handsome man, always immaculately dressed," exhibiting exemplary values and outstanding ability in his professional roles, accolades include admiration for Mumford the person, the friend and the family man. His interests and dedication were reflected and emulated in later years in the Land Grant and government-oriented careers within his own family.

The family was in residence on the University Campus in the historic farmhouse-style structure still known as Mumford House. Herbert and Lena Crosby were married in 1898. Their children, Curtis, Mary, James, Herbert, Jr., and Virginia, had great pride in their father. Virginia Mumford Kimball characterizes him as "a great father; a great family man; gentle of speech; deep faith and morality; humility; sense of humor with a sparkle in his eyes and a sharp tennis player with a vicious return." Fond family recollections include summers spent at Brookwater Farm. Virginia recalls also the daily rides to school in the surrey drawn by their English saddle horse, so exactly timed that they served as a "clock check" for those along the route.

Especially remembered is her father's periodic dramatic recitation from Bryant's *Thanatopsis*: "So

live that when thy summons comes. . . lie down to pleasant dreams."

Unfortunately, Herbert Mumford's "summons" was untimely and tragic following an accident in 1938.

Summary

No biographer, beyond a half century later, can more effectively recount the professional and personal achievements and attributes of Herbert Windsor Mumford than were expressed by peers at the time of his death, in countless letters, resolutions and news accounts from individuals, institutions, organizations, governmental units and publications.

"Dean Mumford was one of the outstanding, forward-looking men in American Agriculture" (Henry Wallace, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture).

"With a high idealism that matched his broad knowledge and practical common sense, he gave unstintingly and unselfishly of his unusual ability, broad vision, sound judgment and reliable convictions. . ." (Resolution of the University Faculty Senate).

"Herbert Windsor Mumford has left an inspiring record of professional accomplishment and of service to mankind of which the University of Illinois, his colleagues, his friends, and his family will always be proud. . . a great teacher, a keen investigator, a wise administrator, a splendid gentlemen. . . and loyal friend" (President A. C. Willard, University of Illinois).